

SPIRITUAL BELIEFS OF THE OVIMBUNDU OF ANGOLA

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THE Ovimbundu are a Bantu Negro tribe of Angola, a territory sometimes known as Portuguese West Africa. Historical evidence suggests migration of the Ovimbundu from the southwest Congo region, and an examination of their language and culture gives support to this supposition. Therefore consideration of the spiritual beliefs of the Ovimbundu is but a sample of a widely distributed complex of spiritual concepts and magical practices which may be regarded as representative of Bantu Negro religion.

The word religion is here used with its broadest connotation, and for anthropological purposes the assumption is made that the term may legitimately include concepts of a supreme being, ideas concerning spiritual parts which survive bodily death, the veneration of ancestral ghosts, omens, spiritual sanction for conduct, funeral rites as an indication of spiritual beliefs, and finally a series of practices by which the medicine-men seek to control powers or forces that are superior to human agencies.

Discussion of philosophical problems concerning the inter-relatedness of spiritual beliefs and their sequence of development has been intentionally ignored since the primary aim has been a presentation of factual material for the general reader. The data given here are a fragment of those collated during my leadership of the Frederick H. Rawson-Field Museum Expedition of 1929-1930.

The Supreme Being

Suku is the name of the most important dead person mentioned by the Ovimbundu. The name is known throughout the great territory inhabited by them. Ngonga, my interpreter, says that Suku made the mountains, rivers, sky, and people. Evidence regarding Suku was supplemented at Ngalangi by two Ovimbundu boys who agreed Suku was very important. They associated him with rain; but the word Suku does not mean rain, water, or food; these are expressed by *ombela*, *ovava*, and *okulia* respectively. I know of no meaning of the word Suku which might assist in explaining the

attributes of this respected spirit. Names of medicine-men are remembered and used but they are not associated with the name Suku. Names of kings are sometimes coupled with the name Suku.

At Ngalangi I was told that in the beginning everything was water. A man, dropped from above, caused land to appear, and began hunting. At the side of a stream he saw an animal which disappeared beneath the water. He was about to shoot when he saw that the animal was a person like himself but different. He took the animal home, tamed it, and soon found that he had a family. This story is told also at Chilesso about two hundred miles from Ngalangi. At Ngalangi I was informed that the first being was a calf with human attributes, who walked about on the rocks leaving mixed tracks of animal and human kind, which may be seen to this day.

Survival After Death

I am quite unable to think that the Ovimbundu have a definite idea of a future life, but they certainly do think of survival after death in a vague and confused way. There is no idea of punishment or reward, but a bad man has a bad ghost which can do evil things. Spirits will follow their relations on earth, moreover they will come to the house of bows where their property is preserved. A man returning from a hunt or from the collection of honey will leave a little of these on a grave. There is no idea of spirits in rivers and trees, but the first tree felled for building the house of a man of importance must not be allowed to fall violently. Spirits move at night only. Mentioning the dead by name or whistling at night calls spirits. There are many instances of sacrifice more or less connected with the idea of a spirit who has to be appeased. The medicine-man can induce a spirit into an image of wood. Thus there is an endowed image which can show travelers the right path, and so forth.

Osande is a good spirit who will "bring good luck and do good things for the people." Ondeke is a bad spirit who harms the people. When a person is sick, mad, or dizzy he has Ondeke. Only a powerful medicine-man can cast out Ondeke. There is an evil bird of the night whose name is Esuvi, who can catch a spirit in order to make it die a second death. A person who has bad health says, "The spirit of my grandfather has been caught by Esuvi."

Later when I asked Ngonga about Osande and Ondeke, he spoke in the plural of these spirits, calling good spirits *olosande*; bad

spirits, *olondele*. The medicine-man will visit a hut to tell the family news of the future, and while there he will put a concoction in an image to which he addresses questions. He stops his nostrils, then feigns answers from the image in a falsetto voice. The father of a family, or possibly the mother's brother, may kill an animal in front of the hut. He says to Osande, "We hope when we kill this there will be no more sickness." The Ovimbundu are afraid of death, and will sacrifice to Osande to ask that there shall be no death in the family.

I do not think that the Ovimbundu distinguish ghosts, spirits, and souls. The part of a man which does not die is sometimes called *utima*; this is the word for heart. Ngonga seems certain that every person irrespective of age, rank and sex has a spirit. When a man kills himself or if he is murdered, he is buried near a river so that his spirit will go to the sea. Women who commit suicide generally do so by hanging or drowning; men stab themselves in the heart or use a flintlock gun, pulling the trigger with their toes. It is feared that the spirit of a suicide will return to induce another suicide in the family.

Taboos and Omens

There is a taboo against killing *oka kuhu*; but it is not quite certain whether *oka kuhu* is the yellow-backed duiker or the hartebeest. When Ngonga was sick he was forbidden to eat the flesh of the duiker *ombambi*; neither is this flesh to be eaten by people who are dizzy. In former days women were not allowed to eat eggs. The flesh of sheep and goats is said to be indigestible for children between the ages of three and six years. The flesh of the lion, leopard, and hyena is forbidden as food for the king, but other people may eat of it. The king is, in fact, forbidden to eat the flesh of any animal which has paws; neither may he eat the bush buck. A medicine-man must not eat the flesh of the dog except before a ceremony for curing the sick.

A woman must not step over the legs of a male, nor a man, over the legs of a woman; to do so causes weakness of the knees. A man or woman may step over the legs of a child.

Omens are numerous. It is bad to see a snake holding a frog. The person who sees this must go to the medicine-man at once. If anyone, setting out from home meets a woman carrying corn meal or any other white substance, he must take a little of it, whiten

the face, and all will be well. A fly in the mouth is a good sign because the fly knows where there is some meat. A stranger visiting a village is pleased when a dog is the first animal to enter the guest house. Dogs are fed, so the entry of a dog is a sign that the visitor will be fed. The appearance of a goat is a bad omen, because goats pick up a frugal living as best they may.

Religion and Conduct

I could not discover that any beliefs influenced conduct. The Ovimbundu have many high standards of conduct. However, there is no idea of sin; that is to say, there are no commands laid down by some authority which is more than human. The idea of crime is well developed. Many actions are known to be punishable because they contravene the laws of the tribe. Adultery is a crime on a par with theft, but is not a sin.

Perhaps *ekandu* is the only word which could express sin. An Ovimbundu would say that murder is the chief *ekandu*. "Ekandu is to make anything have a bad time." To send a stranger along the wrong path is *ekandu*. It would be *ekandu* to throw an animal on the fire. It is *ekandu* to be guilty of fornication with the sister of one's wife. Such an act appears to be *ekandu* only if the wife's sister is visiting the house of the culprit. The male defaulter appears to be blameless. The people of the village from which the wife's sister came would be expected to pay the wronged wife. For sexual offences against young children the death penalty or banishment would be inflicted.

This subject of moral responsibility leads naturally into the question of laws and penalties. There are among the Ovimbundu well defined moral codes and clearly formulated tribal laws but these are not dependent on divine commands neither do they result from injunctions laid down by ancestral spirits.

Funeral Rites

In the village of Chilema in the district of Elende, I witnessed the funeral rites of a boy of twelve years. When a few hundred yards from the village I heard sounds of drumming coming from a secluded place in the tall grass. On reaching the clearing I saw four drummers each with a tubular drum between his legs. The man on the left of the drumming squad played with an up-and-down movement of his left hand only; this provided the base tone. Other drum-

mers played with palms and fingers of both hands. Thirty feet away stood a group of women who started the rhythm for the drums by clapping their hands and continued it as an accompaniment to the drums. Near by were men seated on the ground, while a large number of women walked about or sat on the ground chatting and smoking their pipes. The general impression was not one of solemnity.

My interpreter, Ngonga, who was a relative of the deceased boy, explained to the people that I was seriously interested. I sat down by the father of the dead boy and talked with him through my interpreter. In the meantime I observed visually and by aid of the olfactory sense that the corpse was in a cloth-covered box slung on a pole and supported on the shoulders of two men who stood very close to the drummers. The bearers remained immovable except for the occasional changing of the coffin pole from one shoulder to the other. At intervals women came out of the group to dance near the coffin, one, two, or three at a time. A boy was particularly energetic in making wild leaps and whirls in front of the coffin. These detached and spontaneous performances lasted each about two minutes.

After two hours the bearers of the coffin moved away, followed on one side by some of the men, on the other side by some of the women. A large number of men and women remained behind with the drummers who continued their music while the solo dancing proceeded as before. The corpse was removed to a place about a hundred yards from the spot where the initial ceremonies had been performed. The bearers still held the coffin on their shoulders while men and women arranged themselves in sitting positions on each side of the bier. This part of the proceeding was quiet and solemn; there was very little conversation, though I observed that some tobacco-smoking continued among both men and women.

A woman of about forty-five years of age held a plate of corn meal in her hand while she stood close to the corpse and in line with the bier. She addressed the corpse very earnestly and paused intermittently for a reply. While speaking, the woman looked intently at the foremost of the bearers. Both bearers stood immovable with heads inclined forward and eyes directed to the ground. This woman was the sister of the father of the dead boy. My interpreter said that she must be the oldest sister. The woman was asking why the boy died.

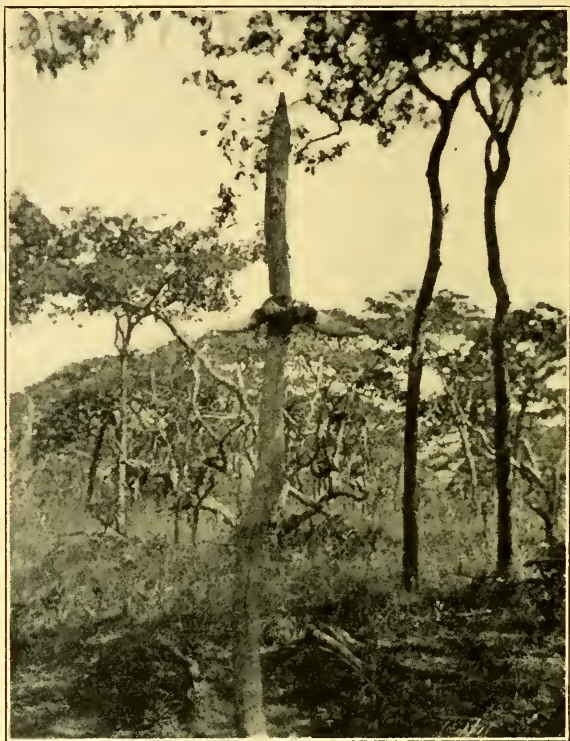
After she had addressed the corpse, an old man, the brother of the father's mother took her place. He held up the plate of meal and earnestly asked questions. Ngonga explained that the woman addresses the corpse "to give him sense so that he will not be ashamed to tell all about it" (that is, about the manner of his death). The old man said, "*Etali* (today) *omalange* (my boy) *tu yongola* (we want) *okn* (you) *tu* (us) *sanjuisa* (make glad) *o tu* (to us) *sapuila* (tell) *muele* (indeed) *cosi* (all) *ca* (that) *kn upa* (you takes) *kilu lieve* (from earth.)"

The pause which follows a question was intended to give the corpse time to reply. It is supposed that if the answer is in the negative the corpse causes the pole to swing slightly backward. An affirmative answer is given if the corpse makes the pole swing forward. The old man demanded "Is it witchcraft that hates us and killed you? If it is witchcraft, come to the front." I could see no swing of the corpse on the pole, but Ngonga said that he could see the coffin swing backward to indicate a negative answer.

The next question, whether Sambulu caused the death, calls for a detailed explanation. Sambulu is a bad spirit which is able to cause death when there are crying women and children. The mother of the dead boy was a slave whose husband was absent from the village for a time. During this period her master threatened to sell her; consequently she went to the mission with her children. They were crying, hence the possibility that the evil Sambulu had at this time entered the person of the boy now deceased. This happened a year ago, but the lapse of time apparently made no difference. The corpse made a negative answer to this ingenious suggestion. While the corpse was interrogated, males among the spectators spoke to the old man who was asking the questions, suggesting inquiries which might be made as to the cause of death. Eventually the corpse indicated that death was due to a "bad belly." If no answer is returned affirmatively recourse is made to the medicine-man who carries out divination.

The day was now far advanced, so Ngonga and I returned across the hills to Elende. From further inquiries respecting funeral customs, I elicited the following information from him. Burial would take place a mile or more from the village in a grave dug by the father's sister's children. The depth of the grave is about six feet. Each village has its own burial ground. The woman who questioned the corpse carried a sleeping mat which is spread on the bottom of

the grave, or placed outside the grave on the mound of earth. Ngonga said that the box of a well-to-do person would be broken and placed on the grave; the breaking is necessary in order to prevent theft. I could find no trace of the idea that property is broken so that its spirit will accompany the man to a world of spirits. I have found among the Ovimbundu no indication of animism or animatism.



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HORNS OF AN OX ON THE GRAVE OF AN OCIMBUNDU, CACONDA

I was unable to see the corpse, which was in a wooden box covered with a thin piece of blue and white checkered cloth tightly wound about the coffin. Ngonga explained that the corpse was prepared in the following manner before it was placed in the coffin. The body was extended in a supine position with the thumbs tied, the palms together, and the hands on the pubes. The great toes were tied together and the upper arms were bound to the torso with bands of bark or cloth.

At the funeral of a baby one of the grandmothers carries the dead child to the grave on her back. The ceremony of questioning the corpse is carried out if the child is old enough to walk and talk. If the child were unable to talk, the parents, accompanied by their brothers and sisters, would visit the medicine-man to inquire the cause of death. There are a few special observances connected with the burial of twins. When the children were alive the mother had to shake a rattle or to blow a small horn instead of giving the usual greetings to a passerby. This she has to do at the funeral. The wooden figure which a barren or bereaved woman nurses at her breast is interesting in this connection.

When a medicine-man dies the people call in another medicine-man to take charge of the ceremonies. The corpse is tied in a sitting posture which is the attitude for burial. His charms are attached to his body. The head ornament, which may be feathers, quills of the porcupine, or hair from a goat's beard, is placed upright on the head and fastened by a band under the chin. The corpse is kept in a seated position lashed to a stool for three days. There is no coffin. The corpse is carried in a seated position to the grave which is dug at cross paths. The corpse of a medicine-man is questioned in the same manner as that of a commoner. When the corpse is placed in the grave the medicine-men dance; they have "spirit in their heads," shake their heads while dancing, and without pausing, each eats a living chicken which he carries in his hand. At the side of the grave a dog, a chicken, and a goat are killed. No part of the flesh is buried; it is consumed by the people. A sleeping mat is placed in the grave. On the mound of earth are placed horns filled with medicine, and in addition there will be the skins which used to hang from the waist of the man when he was performing. The rain-making charms are not buried in the grave, because their interment would cause the rainfall to diminish; the charms may, however, be placed on the outside of the grave. No food is placed in or on the grave. The mound of earth is painted with a human male figure. An *osoma* or a *sekulu* (king or chief) will visit the grave of a medicine-man to ask for rain or other favors.

When a new medicine-man is making medicine or performing ceremonies he uses the name of a deceased medicine-man. It is thought that the dead medicine-man has spirits which he is able to send to earth. No images of the medicine-man are made. Medicine-

men visit a grave at night in order to take parts of a corpse to include in their medicine. At Caconda in western Angola I obtained the complete outfit of a medicine-man who included in his equipment two small hoe blades which he used for disinterring the dead. There was a portion of a human tibia in the basket.

The funeral of a medicine-woman is the same as that of a male, except that medicine-women carry the corpse.

A chief is buried in a specially constructed enclosure in the village over which he ruled. The mausoleum is a small hut with a substantial wooden door. This is surrounded by a strongly built wooden fence ten feet high. In the capital of Ngalangi the king showed me the inside of the burial place of kings which contained four mounds of earth each of which covered the body of a king. A little distance away were the graves of the principal wives. The hut contained pottery and gourds, also a small fire which, replenished by an attendant, is not allowed to be extinguished.

Ngonga says that the burial chamber at Elende contains the head of the chief in a box. After one year from the time of burial the box containing the head is opened in order that a libation of beer may be poured over it. Sometimes the head is anointed with palm oil and a new band of cloth is added. These attentions are paid to the head in time of sickness and drought. If the head shows signs of desiccation an ox is killed in order to provide a piece of skin in which the head is sewn. The tomb is visited by men who come to ask for good fortune when they are departing for a journey to the interior. These supplicants are led to the tomb by the ruling chief. Near to the burial place of the chief at Elende there was the house of bows, which is typical of several I have seen in different parts of Angola. I have been inside these repositories which always contain staffs, bows, arrows, sleeping mats, and possibly other articles which belonged to dead chiefs.

The corpse of a king is suspended to the top of the burial hut by a rope which is tightly fastened around the neck. Death is not admitted; "The king has a cold in his head." The head of a family, specially selected, twists the rope until the head is severed. The twisting is carried out gradually, a little each day, so that a week or more is required for the severance of the head. In former times severance was accomplished by twisting only, but at present a knife is used to help the friction of the rope. When the body of the king

has fallen into the basket placed underneath to receive it, the people may say that the king is dead; mourning then begins.

According to the arrangement I saw at the *ombala* of Ngalangi, the bodies are at the present time buried in a hut constructed as a burial place for kings. The older method was cave burial. The burial posture for a king is the same as that described for a medicine-man. Mourning for a king lasts for seven days, during which time the children and wives of the king wear strips of oxhide on their left wrists. The chiefs gather to choose a king from the "blood of kings." "Sometimes a bad man will make himself king without waiting to be chosen." The choice should be in favor of the oldest son of the chief wife, but "if she has stupid sons, a son of another wife will be chosen."

Sometimes in time of drought chiefs and their wives go to the grave of a chief. They say, "If you are angry tell us what you want. If you want an ox we will kill one." If they visit the tomb of a king, the king's corpse is asked, "Do you want a new box for your head? We will make one." The oldest chief takes from the tomb the box which contains the head. This is slung on a pole supported on the shoulders of two boys. The head is questioned after the manner of interrogating a corpse. The oldest chief carries out the sacrifice which is suggested by the forward movement of the head-box on the pole.

The house is not burnt after death has occurred within, but it is still customary to take down the surrounding fence and to build a new one. The house is then used as before. I was definitely told at the capital of Ngalangi, by the king himself, that he must continue to use the house of former kings until the structure collapses. Since no repair work may be done, it was in very dilapidated condition.

Tree burial I have not seen, but I heard of it near Ngalangi. It is the method for the very poor who have died in debt. Any one who gives interment to the corpse takes over the responsibility for the debts; hence tree burial is the most convenient way of disposal. Tree burial has recently taken place at Chilesó.

In traveling in the District of Ganda, likewise in the Esele country of the hinterland of Novo Redondo, one cannot fail to notice the presence of rock tombs which are the mausoleums of hunters. These are invariably placed in commanding positions on domes of rock and are built up from pieces of granite de-

tached from the rocks which serve as a base. Horns of animals are placed on the tomb which is decorated by a stick bearing the tail of an animal. From a tomb of similar structure it was possible to detach a slab so that the interior could be seen. There were two male skeletons; one lay supine, the bones of the other were in disorder.

A mourning widow must leave her hair loose and undressed, and must wear a cloth which conceals her from crown to sole. For three days she has to sleep close to the corpse of her husband with only a stick, which is about the length of the bed, between them. During this time she has no food and is expected to wail continuously day and night. When the corpse is prepared for burial the widow says goodbye to it. Relatives hold the corpse up and make it advance toward her. She is held in the position of a bound corpse and supported by relatives. The widow does not go to the funeral. Mourning continues with fasting and periodical wailing at three o'clock in the afternoon and again twelve hours later. After a month, the widow lies for one night in the place where the corpse of her husband lay the night before burial. A beer-drinking marks the end of the period of mourning, at which the medicine-man guides her hand as she dips a ladle into the beer pot to distribute the drinks.

The widow may stay with her mother's brother or she may return to her parents, but she must not become the wife of another man until a year has elapsed. Mourning ceremonies of this kind are typical of Bantu ideas concerning the necessary propitiation of ancestral ghosts who are inclined to be jealous and vindictive.

Magical Practices

Training for the position of magician (*ocimbanda*) is not carried out with formality ending in initiatory rites, neither is the position hereditary; but the boy or girl who wishes to become an *ocimbanda* must have "spirit in the head." Among the Ovimbundu there does not appear to be an intensifying of natural neuroses by seclusion, starvation, or beating. When a boy is sick, the medicine-man says, "You have a spirit who wants you to be *ocimbanda*." He kills a dog, a goat, and four chickens. The boy must then go around with him carrying his apparatus and obeying him in every way. The female *ocimbanda* is called *chambula*

by other women; her services are preferred in cases of difficult childbirth.

Magical practices are of two kinds, social and anti-social. The man who carries out divination, rain-making, healing the sick, and many other functions is *ocimbanda*, while the secret worker of evil, the witch or wizard, is *onganga*. In one village there may be several men and women each of whom receives the name *ocimbanda*, though specialization in some particular form of magical practice is the rule. An *ocimbanda* who has the reputation for curing dizziness, madness, and *onyalai* is one of great repute; so also is the man who can cure a case of blood in the urine (*Portuguese biliosa*).

Indication of the equipment and method of the *ocimbanda* is given by an examination of the small divination basket. The contents of such a basket from Bailundu give an idea of the nature of inferences which are drawn, when certain of these objects come to the top after the basket has been shaken.

A figure with beads on its neck indicates that trouble is due to the ghost of a dead baby whose spirit wishes to come back.

A shell of a gourd with round orifice means that someone has been talking too much.

Two figures, male and female, whispering together, indicate that a husband and wife are planning to poison somebody.

A figure of a female with a large abdomen indicates that the spirit of a deceased pregnant woman is causing trouble.

A horn with shells on it indicates that the woman who is consulting the diviner will not bear children.

When a little figure with a black tuft on its head comes to the top of the basket, it indicates that trouble among the natives is caused by the white man. When dealing with this figure the medicine-man tries to speak like a white man.

A figure with a little crest on its head is the indication of trouble due to the spirit which likes to drink blood. When this figure comes to the top of the basket, the medicine-man induces the blood-drinking spirit to enter a man. This person dances with a small axe or a hair switch in his hand. When the dancing has induced a frenzy, the dancer kills a pig and drinks the fresh blood. The blood-drinking spirit is then exorcised from the community.

If the figure with joined legs comes to the top of the basket the meaning is that a medicine-man used to be in the family of

the consultant. The spirit of this medicine-man wishes some member of the family to become a medicine-man.

The snake signifies cords and binding. To dream of a snake indicates that the dreamer will be tied and sold into slavery. When the wooden snake comes to the top of the basket the significance is that a spirit has tied the sick person who is consulting the diviner.

If the wooden figure of a girl appears at the top of the basket the inference is, that the spirit which is causing trouble is that of a girl.

The appearance of a thin wooden figure at the top of the basket means that the troublesome spirit is that of a person who died when away on a long and fatiguing journey. The afflicted one has to make an offering to one of the wooden human figures which are to be found along trade routes.

A piece of iron in the basket may come to the top when the contents are shaken. In this case it is assumed that a death has or will take place. The death is attributed to something, for example, alcohol, which has come from white people.

A fragment from the hoof of an ox indicates that a troublesome spirit desires an ox to be sacrificed. If a sick man is consulting the diviner, he is told to take a drink containing the parings of the hoof of an ox.

The bone from a chicken's leg indicates that sickness has come from the road, that is from a journey. The Ovimbundu have been famous for their long journeys across Africa, hence the implication seems to be that a disease of an infectious kind has been brought from a distance.

A corn cob indicates that trouble has arisen from a spirit which can affect the growth of corn.

A coin indicates that the sick or deceased person was too fond of money; misfortune has come from the spirit who gives wealth and good luck, because it has been offended in some way.

There is in the divination basket a white bone which signifies laughter. A small cocoon of sticks, which I think belongs to a caddis-fly, means that some one has stolen a bale of cloth.

Small round shells indicate that everything is well.

A boat indicates that someone will be drowned.

The handle of a hoe is the symbol of cultivation. The appearance of a miniature handle at the top of the basket implies

that the spirit of a woman who was rich in corn is troubling the community.

Two connected, human wooden figures indicate that a twin will die. The Ovimbundu welcome twins; when one is dead the mother has a wooden figure made to take its place. This is nursed to induce another conception.

A little gourd means that the deceased person was poisoned for stealing from a field.



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INITIATION OF BOYS

At the final ceremony the boys pretend to be spirits of the dead.

The seed of the oil palm means that a large gourd of palm oil has been stolen.

The only musical instruments used by the *ocimbanda* appear to be the small friction drum and the rattle.

At Ngalandi I saw a medicine-man give a dance during which he slashed about him with a small axe, which was evidently a ceremonial object, as the construction was too light to make it effective as a tool or weapon. At Bailundu I was informed that the axe is used in a dance which is intended to cure a man who is sick because a spirit has entered into him. The sickness may have occurred because the man has broken a promise.

Without parallel among ceremonial objects used by the Ovimbundu is a small wooden cloth-covered box from Bailundu. This contains a piece of root of cylindrical form tightly bound with cloth, having at one end a cowrie shell. The box is the home of Kandundu, for whom a small hut is built in order to contain the box. Anyone who sees the contents of the box is said to go blind. Kandundu is believed to be the "spirit of dreaming who makes swellings come on the body."

Antelope horns are in general use as containers of magical potions. A large horn, filled with a mixture of goat's fat and charcoal is intended for use in curing the sick; the contents, liquid when heated, are dropped on the heads of the patients. One horn from Bailundu is used for holding sweet beer which is drunk by one afflicted by bad dreams. A horn with a piece of fur attached contains a mixture of fat and charcoal which is heated after sundown, near camp, when men are on the march. The spreading fumes keep away lions and thieves. It was said that the thief is kept away because the fumes make him cough.

A charm in the form of small neckbands of plaited fiber with two or three cowrie shells attached is worn by women who wish to induce conception. A tortoise shell containing fat and charcoal is worn by the mother of a child who is afflicted by the spirit of Kandundu, which may cause the baby to have skin eruptions or a very small amount of hair. In order to cure the child the *mother* must eat small quantities of the contents of the shell from time to time.

At Cangamba I saw an *ocimbanda* performing a ceremony which was supposed to make a thief return to the village for trial. The medicine-man sat on his haunches holding in one hand a small rattle and in the other a slender stick on which the decorated carapace of a tortoise was poised. Very earnestly the man talked, shook his head, and gazed at the tortoise shell which began to twist on its pivot. As the *ocimbanda* talked and shook his rattle, the movement of the shell grew faster. Presently the rotation of the tortoise shell was reversed, but so adroitly that I could not follow the movement or imitate it when allowed to try. The reversal of the movement of the carapace on its pivot represents the culprit turning back to his village. The operator was, I believe, a Chokue man, but at Cangamba there is a mixture of Ovimbundu, Valuchazi, Babunda, Ambuella, and Vachokue tribes.

It was also at Cangamba that I saw a female *ocimbanda* painting marks on the face of a sick woman. Twice at this place I witnessed the treatment of a sick woman by a male *ocimbanda*. In the first instance the sick woman knelt in front of a hut two feet high which contained a clay leopard marked with white dots. The *ocimbanda* dipped a bunch of leaves in water and stroked this along her spine from the neck to the sacrum.

The second performance was more elaborate. A screen of boughs was erected outside the hut of the medicine-man and on one side of this stood two male drummers, on the other side were three wooden posts, each two feet high, circular in cross-section, and painted with geometrical figures. Near the posts was a basket, so closely woven that it contained water, in which green twigs and leaves were soaking. The drums began to beat while a group of women clapped hands in rhythm. The patient knelt before the small painted wooden posts close to the basket of water, into which she dipped her face from time to time. The *ocimbanda* took wet twigs from the basket, which he drew slowly along the spine of the patient from neck to sacrum, as if painting with a brush. She would shiver from head to foot, then remain still except for the dipping of her face in the water until the next paroxysm shook her. This continued for ten minutes. The *ocimbanda* then knelt by the woman, dug a small hole in the ground, and pulled up one of the painted wooden posts which he placed in the patient's hands. He kept his hands over hers while she transferred the painted post to the new hole which he had prepared. Finally the basket of water and leaves was buried thirty feet from the scene of operations.

At Elende a hole in the ground contained a heap of stones and I was informed that this was a sweat bath. Cold water is thrown over the hot stones so that steam arises to the patient who crouches above the hole covered with a blanket. Among the varied duties of the medicine-man is washing the body of a king or a chief. This is performed in a hut specially reserved for the purpose, with water to which some of the blood of a freshly killed chicken has been added.

The guilt or innocence of suspects is still tested by giving poison to chickens brought to the medicine-man by the accused. The *ocimbanda* gives the dose. He whose chicken dies is guilty.

The only occasion on which I saw the rain-maker at work was at Ngalangi. He was reluctant to perform, as the rainy season was

far from due, but eventually he was persuaded to do so. He danced by springing from one leg to the other in quick time, while now and then he sprang into the air with a twisting motion. His arms were held high then drawn slowly down, as if symbolizing falling rain. He then stood still and went through arm and hand movements as if he were spreading something over the earth. Presently the dancing would be resumed, only to be interrupted again by the slow arm movements. At times the dancer stood still and gave a shrill whistle with his mouth. During the whole performance the rain-maker carried in his right hand a switch made by fastening hair from a cow's tail onto a wooden handle.

The foregoing observations suggest that the Ovimbundu have, in common with other Bantu Negroes, an idea of a supreme being who is remote and otiose, but a lively and energizing factor is found in veneration of ghosts of the departed who constitute a link between the spiritual and mundane worlds. Religious beliefs do not, however, appear directly to influence standards of conduct by laying down ethical principles for whose infraction punishments are prescribed, and for whose observance rewards are offered.

Almost every aspect of tribal life centers in the *ocimbanda* who by virtue of innate qualities and training is a mediary between the sacred and the profane, and as such he seeks to avert evil while securing the aid of spiritual forces. Opposed to the *ocimbanda* is the *nganga* who directs his magic toward anti-social ends, including impotence, sterility, sickness and death.

Around these spiritual forces the economic and social life gyrate, with the medicine-man as a pivotal point on whom the whole tribal structure depends.